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# Executive Summary of Research and Strategic Marketing Recommendations For The Expansion of Passenger Rail Service Along the 1-295 Corridor

Maine Department of Transportation

Swardlick Marketing Group

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**Executive Summary of Research  
and  
Strategic Marketing Recommendations  
For The Expansion of Passenger Rail Service  
Along the I-295 Corridor**

**Presented to:  
The Maine Department of Transportation  
Office of Passenger Transportation**

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**July 25, 2003**

**JUL 31 2003**

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## **I. Background**

The Maine Department of Transportation, Office of Passenger Transportation recognizes that rail transportation is a key component of the continued development of the passenger transportation infrastructure in Maine. Looking towards the future, the strategic value of rail service to points north of Portland is believed to be significant not only in contributing to the quality of life of Maine people, but also as a vehicle of economic development.

Considering the anticipated increases of population density, commerce and traffic along the Interstate 295, Interstate 95 and U.S. Route 1 corridor between Portland and Brunswick, Maine, it is reasonable to theorize that the demand for passenger transportation, including rail, is likely to grow in that area. Thus, the expansion of passenger rail service along the I-295, I-95 and U.S. Rt. 1 corridor is included in the Strategic Passenger Transportation Plan for the State of Maine, which was developed by the Maine Department of Transportation in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Community Development. Moreover, the expansion northward is a logical next step after the establishment of Amtrak rail service to Portland.

In continuing to execute the Strategic Passenger Transportation Plan on behalf of the people of the state, The Department and the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority are now developing a business plan for the expansion of rail service north of Portland. Included in the development process has been the measurement of vehicle traffic along the subject corridor and related projections of traffic growth as well as other relevant data. As part of the comprehensive approach to the development of the business plan, The Department conducted quantitative consumer research to:

- 1) Evaluate consumer attitudes as one part of exploring the feasibility of Amtrak rail service from Portland to Brunswick, with a stop in Freeport.
- 2) Evaluate the interest level and potential for commuter rail service between Exit 16 - Yarmouth and Portland.

This research project was completed in April and May, 2003 and measured specific items in three categories:

### **General – Public Transportation**

- Perceptions of current and anticipated levels of congestion on roads and highways in Southern Maine
- Use of public transportation in Maine during the past six months
- Ratings of the level and quality of public transportation available in Maine
- Importance of the State in planning for the provision of more public transportation
- Desired improvements to Maine's public transportation system
- Awareness and use of passenger rail service in Maine
- Satisfaction levels with passenger rail service (of those who have used it)
- Evaluation of and support for the current passenger rail service
- Media use/information sources



**Amtrak Passenger Rail Service:**

- Support levels for extending passenger rail service to other Maine communities north of Portland
- Perceived effect of the extended passenger rail service on the economic development and quality of life in the communities north of Portland
- Importance of having the State continue to support passenger rail service

**Commuter Passenger Rail Service:**

- Perceptions of rush-hour congestion on I-295/I-95
- Current commuting information
- Support for commuter rail, Yarmouth to Portland
- Likelihood of using commuter rail and what price willing to pay
- Perceived effect of the commuter service on the quality of life in the communities surveyed
- Importance of continued state support

Section II of this report summarizes the research methodology.

## II. Research Methodology

As stated previously, the purpose of the research project's development and execution was to:

- 1) Evaluate consumer attitudes as one part of exploring the feasibility of Amtrak rail service from Portland to Brunswick, with a stop in Freeport.
- 2) Evaluate the interest level and potential for commuter rail service between Exit 16 - Yarmouth and Portland.

To achieve these research objectives, a quantitative study was used consisting of two comprehensive telephone surveys. One to address a complete series of questions pertaining to the expansion of Amtrak passenger rail service from Portland to Brunswick, with a stop in Freeport. This survey is referred to as the 'Amtrak' survey. The second was developed to address a complete series of questions pertaining to commuter rail service between Exit 16 - Yarmouth and Portland. This survey is referred to as the 'Commuter' survey. Respondents to both surveys were asked several questions about general public transportation in Maine. And, the respondents of the Commuter survey were asked questions relating to Amtrak passenger rail service.

For the 'Amtrak' survey, a random sample of 300 adult residents of Central- and Mid-Coast Maine was interviewed. This random sample was comprised of residents of most of Androscoggin County, the towns of Brunswick and Freeport in Cumberland County, Southern Kennebec County (including Augusta), Lincoln County, Sagadahoc County, and towns in Southern Knox County.

Similarly, a random sample of 250 residents of Yarmouth and contiguous towns was interviewed for the 'Commuter' survey, all of whom identified themselves as currently being commuters from the relevant towns into Greater Portland. This sample was comprised of residents of the towns of Cumberland, Durham, Freeport, North Yarmouth, Pownal and Yarmouth.

A map showing the general survey areas appears in Figure II-A on the following page.

These sample sizes among the total population of the survey areas provide the following confidence levels and margin of error:

- The total results of the 'Amtrak' survey command statistical validity at the 95% confidence level with a margin of error of +/- 5.65%.
- The total results of the 'Commuter' survey command statistical validity at the 95% confidence level with a margin of error of +/- 6.18%

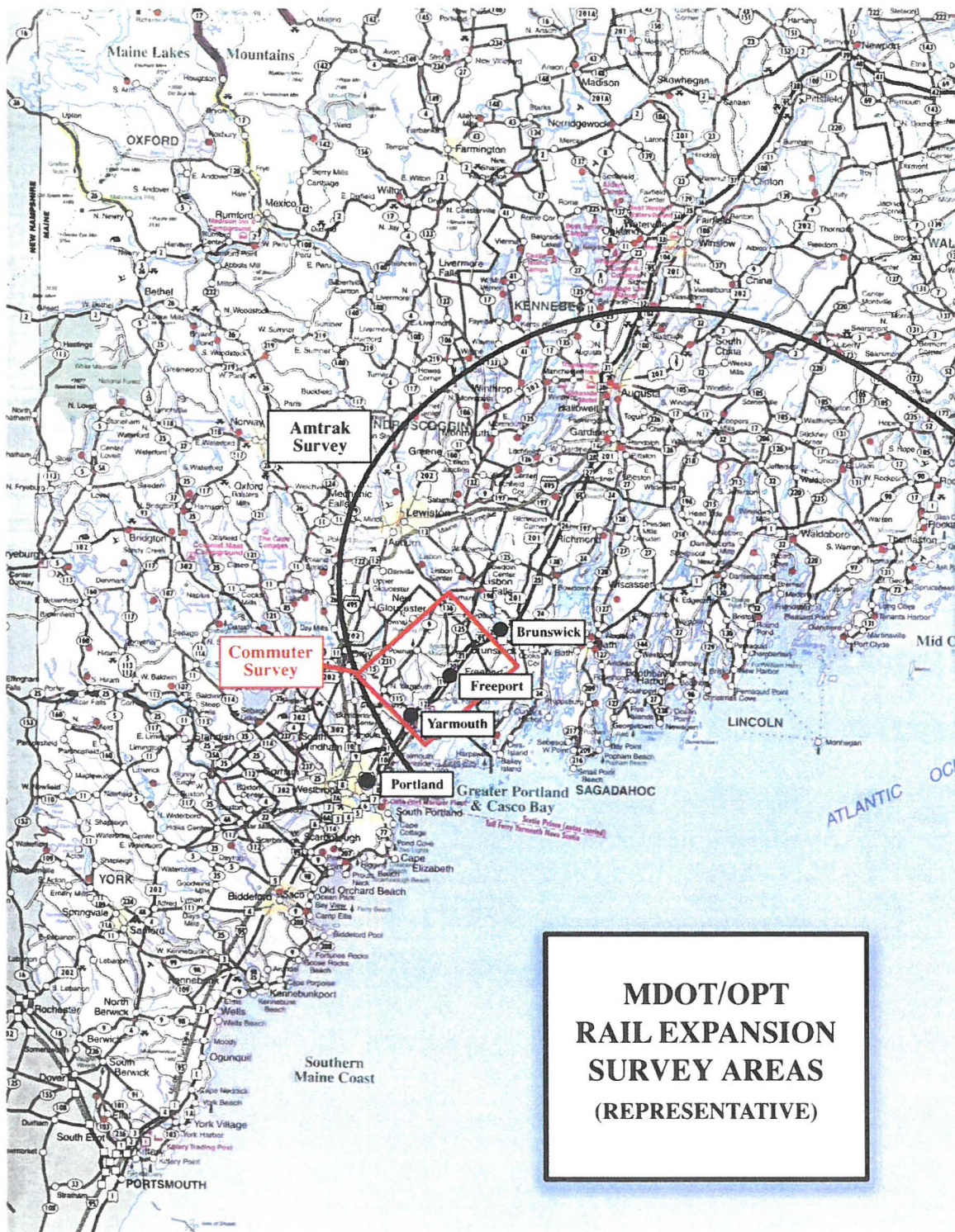


Figure II – A: Map of Survey Areas (Representative)



## II. Research Findings

The complete results of the research project are summarized in *Report to the Maine Department of Transportation and Swardlick Marketing Group / Market Research on Public Transportation Issues – June 2003* by Strategic Marketing Services (a division of Pan Atlantic Consultants) of Portland, Maine. (Strategic Marketing Services was engaged by Swardlick Marketing Group to perform the research portion of the project.) The results of the research were presented to the Department on June 13, 2003. Below is the Executive Summary from that report in its entirety for the convenience of the reader:

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, from “Report to the Maine Department of Transportation and Swardlick Marketing Group / Market Research on Public Transportation Issues” – June 2003**

**‘AMTRAK’ SURVEY:** *The following summarizes the responses to questions pertaining to the expansion of Amtrak passenger rail service from Portland to Brunswick, with a stop in Freeport, as well as general questions relating to public transportation in Maine.*

#### **Results from Public Transportation Questions:** *(Asked as part of the ‘Amtrak’ survey)*

On average, respondents rate the current level of congestion on the roads and highways of Cumberland and York counties as “somewhat high”. They also feel the level of congestion will increase in the next 20 years.

- While 20% of respondents feel the current level of congestion is “very high” on the roads and highways in Cumberland and York Counties, 43% would rate it as “somewhat high” and 23.3% feel it is “normal”.
- When asked what the level of congestion on these same roads and highways will be 20 years from now, 53.7% of respondents said it will be “very high”, 27.3% feel it will be “somewhat high” and 9.0% feel it will be “normal”.

Respondents feel that the current level of congestion on the roads and highways in Maine’s other Southern Counties is somewhat normal, but predict an increase in congestion in the next 20 years.

- Forty-three percent (43.0%) of respondents feel the current level of congestion is “normal” on the roads and highways in Androscoggin, Knox, Lincoln, and Sagadahoc Counties, while thirty-seven percent (37.0%) feel the level of congestion is high (9.0% - “very high” and 28.0% - “somewhat high”).
- When asked what the level of congestion on these roads and highways will be 20 years from now, 64.7% of respondents said it will be (27.7% - “very high” and 37.0% - “somewhat high”), while 23.7% feel it will be “normal”.

**A majority of respondents have not used any form of public transportation in Maine in the past six months.**

- Seventy-seven percent (76.7%) of respondents have not used Maine public transportation in the past six months, while 22.7% have used public transportation in Maine.

**Approximately one in five respondents rate the level of public transportation available to Mainers as “good” or “excellent”, while 34.0% rate the quality of public transportation as “good” or “excellent”.**

- Almost forty-percent (38.3%) of respondents indicated that the level of public transportation available to people in Maine is poor (8.0% - “very poor” and 30.3% - “poor”). Thirty-one percent of respondents rate the level of public transportation available to people in Maine as “fair” and 21.7% rate the level of public transportation as “good” (19.7%) or “excellent” (2.0%).
- Approximately eighteen percent (17.6%) of respondents indicated that the quality of public transportation available to people in Maine is poor (3.3% - “very poor” and 14.3% - “poor”). Twenty-four percent (24.3%) of respondents would rate the quality of public transportation available to people in Maine as “fair” and 34.0% rate the level of public transportation as “good” (31.7%) or “excellent” (2.3%). **Almost one fourth of respondents are unsure about the quality of public transportation in Maine.**

**Almost nine in ten respondents feel it is important for the state to plan for and provide more public transportation to Mainers with the most important benefit of public transportation being cited as the reduction of congestion / the fact that it is good for the environment.**

- Eighty-seven percent of those surveyed (87.3%) feel it is important (36.0% - “somewhat” and 51.3% - “very”) for the State to plan for and provide more public transportation to the residents of Maine, while the remainder do not feel it is important or are unsure.
- Thirty-eight percent of respondents (38.2%) feel the most important benefit of public transportation is that it “is good for the environment / reduces congestion”, 32.8% feel it “elevates the quality of life in Maine”, and 23.3% feel it “aids economic development”.

**The top three desired improvements to Maine’s public transportation system cited by respondents were: extending rail service, improving and expanding bus service, and providing more service in general.**

- Unprompted, fifteen percent of those surveyed indicated that their top desired improvement to Maine’s public transportation system is to “extend rail service to Northern and Central Maine”. Thirteen percent (13.3%) stated that they would like “more buses, more stops, and expanded routes”, while 12.3% would like “more service in general”.

**Results from Amtrak Questions:** *(Asked as part of the 'Amtrak' survey)*

**Nine out of ten respondents are aware of passenger rail service in Maine and 55% of these respondents named Amtrak as the organization that provides this service.**

- Ninety-one percent (90.7%) of respondents indicated that they are aware of passenger rail service in Maine, while 9.3% are not.
- Of those who are aware of the passenger rail service, approximately two-thirds (67.6%) report that they know the name of the organization, while 32.4% do not.
- Of the respondents who are aware of passenger rail service and know the name of the organization that provides it, 81.5% named "Amtrak" as the organization providing rail service, 17.4% cited "Downeaster", and two respondents named "Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority". No respondents cited the "Maine Department of Transportation".

**Approximately one out of five respondents surveyed has used the passenger rail service from Portland to Boston. The majority of these respondents have used this service between 1 and 3 times since its inception.**

- Of the respondents who are aware of passenger rail service in Maine, 23.5% have used the service. **Thus, 21.5% of the entire sample has used the passenger rail service from Portland to Boston.**
- Eighty-six percent (85.9%) of those who are aware of passenger rail service and have used it, have used the service between 1 and 3 times. Eight percent (7.8%) of these respondents have used the service between 4 and 6 times, and 6.3% have used the service "monthly".

**The top three reasons for not using passenger rail service are that the opportunity has not come up to use the service, that it is not convenient, and that the respondent does not travel to Boston.**

- Approximately one-half (51.0%) of those respondents who have not used the passenger rail service said that the "opportunity has not come up", 8.7% feel the train is "not convenient", and 6.7% report that they "don't travel to Boston".

**Respondents who have traveled on the passenger rail service between Portland and Boston give high ratings to the service on most aspects. "Comfort" received the highest average rating and "convenience" received the lowest average rating.**

- On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is "very poor" and 5 is "excellent", respondents who have used the passenger rail service gave "comfort" an average rating of 4.61, "price/value for money" was rated 4.42, and "being on schedule" was rated 4.38. "Amenities on board" was given an average rating of 4.23 and "convenience" was given an average rating of 3.03. **No aspect of the rail service received an average rating of "poor" or "very poor".**

**Of the respondents who are aware of the Portland to Boston passenger rail service, more than three-fourths feel the service has been successful.**

- Seventy-six percent (76.1%) of respondents rate the **"overall success"** of the service as successful (34.9% - "somewhat successful" and 41.2% - "very successful"). Five percent (4.7%) rate the **"overall success"** of the service as unsuccessful (2.9% - "somewhat unsuccessful" and 1.8% - "very unsuccessful"). Seventeen percent (16.5%) of respondents were unsure how they would rate the **"overall success"** of the passenger rail service.
- The top answers of the limited number of respondents who feel the service has not been successful are cutbacks ("heard they cut back" - N = 4) and lack of use ("people don't use it that often" - N = 3).

**There is very high support for the current passenger rail service from Portland to Boston.**

- Eighty-eight percent (88.3%) of respondents support ("somewhat" or "strongly") the current passenger rail service.
- Of the respondents who are opposed to the passenger rail service between Portland and Boston, the top two reasons given why were: "not a good use of money" and "needs to be privately funded".

**There is very high support for extending passenger rail service to other Maine communities north of Portland. Supporters feel this service will reduce traffic, be convenient, and will provide an easy alternative to driving.**

- Eighty-nine percent (89.0%) of respondents support ("somewhat" or "strongly") extending passenger rail service to other Maine communities north of Portland.
- Of the respondents who support the passenger rail service between Portland and Boston, the top three reasons why are: "reduction of cars on the road" (18%), "convenience" (13.9%), and "easier than/alternative to driving" (11.2%).
- Of the respondents who are opposed to the passenger rail service between Portland and Boston, the top three reasons why they are opposed are: "not a good use of tax money", "not enough people would support it", and "there are already buses that go there".

**A large majority of respondents feel that extending passenger rail service north of Portland will have a positive effect on both the economic development of and the quality of life in Greater Central and Mid Coast Maine.**

- Almost nine out of ten respondents (88.0%) stated that having this passenger rail service would have a positive (40.0% - "somewhat positive" and 48.0% - "very positive") effect on economic development in the Greater Central Maine and Mid Coast area.
- Eighty-three percent (83.0%) of those surveyed stated that having this passenger rail service would have a positive (44.0% - "somewhat positive" and 39.0% - "very positive") effect on the quality of life in the Greater Central Maine and Mid Coast area.

**Respondents feel it is very important for the state to continue to support passenger rail service for the citizens of Maine.**

- Nine out of ten respondents (90.6%) feel it is important (31.3% - "somewhat important" and 59.3% - "very important") for the state to continue to support passenger rail service for the citizens of Maine.

**Respondents prefer to get information about passenger rail service primarily from newspapers, the Internet, and television.**

- One-third (33.0%) of respondents would like to get information about passenger rail service from newspapers, 32.3% from the Internet, and 17.3% from television.



**COMMUTER SURVEY** *The following summarizes the responses to questions pertaining to commuter rail service between Exit 16 - Yarmouth and Portland, as well as general questions relating to public transportation in Maine.*

**Results from Public Transportation Questions:** *(Asked as part of the 'Commuter' survey)*

**On average, respondents rate the current level of congestion on the roads and highways of Cumberland and York counties as "somewhat high" to "normal", but feel the level of congestion will increase in the next 20 years.**

- While 10% of respondents feel the current level of congestion is "very high" on the roads and highways in Cumberland and York Counties, 47.2% would rate it as "somewhat high" and 40.4% feel it is "normal".
- When asked what the level of congestion on these roads and highways will be in 20 years from now, 48.4% of respondents feel it will be "very high", 34.8% feel it will be "somewhat high" and 15.2% feel it will be "normal".

**A majority of respondents have not used any form of public transportation in Maine in the past six months.**

- Seventy-seven percent (77.2%) of respondents have not used Maine public transportation in the past six months, while 22.8% have used public transportation in Maine.
- Residents of Pownal reported the lowest use of public transportation (16.7% of residents have used public transportation in the past six months, while 83.3% have not), while Freeport residents comprised the highest proportion of users (27.4% have used public transportation recently, while 72.6% have not).

**Approximately three in ten respondents rate the level of public transportation available to Mainers as "good" or "excellent", while 42% rate the quality of public transportation as "good" or "excellent".**

- Close to thirty percent (28.8%) of respondents rate the level of public transportation as "good" (27.6%) or "excellent" (1.2%). Over one-fourth (27.2%) of respondents indicated that the level of public transportation available to people in Maine is poor (3.6% - "very poor" and 23.6% - "poor"). Thirty-four percent (34.4%) of respondents rate the level of public transportation available to people in Maine as "fair".
- Forty-two percent (41.6%) rate the level of public transportation as "good" (38.4%) or "excellent" (3.2%). Seven percent (6.8%) of respondents indicated that the quality of public transportation available to people in Maine is poor (1.2% - "very poor" and 5.6% - "poor"). Twenty-two percent (22.4%) of respondents rate the quality of public transportation available to people in Maine as "fair". **Almost three in ten respondents are unsure about the quality of public transportation in Maine.**

**Approximately nine in ten respondents feel it is important for the state to plan for and provide more public transportation to Mainers with the most important benefit of public transportation being environmental / reduction of congestion.**

- Ninety percent of those surveyed (89.6%) feel it is important (47.2% - "somewhat" and 42.4% - "very") for the state to plan for and provide more public transportation to the residents of Maine.
- Fifty-seven percent of respondents (57.1%) feel the most important benefit of public transportation is that it "is good for the environment / reduces congestion", 22.8% feel it "elevates the quality of life in Maine", and 15.2% feel it "aids economic development".

**The top three desired improvements to Maine's public transportation system cited by respondents were: extending rail service, improving and expanding bus service, and providing more service in general.**

- Eighteen percent (17.6%) of respondents stated that they would like "more buses, more stops, and expanded routes". Thirteen percent (12.8%) of those surveyed indicated that they would like public transportation to "cover wider areas" and 11.6% suggest "extending rail service to Northern and Central Maine".

**Results from Amtrak Questions:** *(Asked as part of the 'Commuter' survey)*

**Almost all of those surveyed are aware of passenger rail service in Maine and 63% of these respondents named Amtrak as the organization that provides this service.**

- Ninety-nine percent (98.8%) of respondents indicated that they are aware of passenger rail service in Maine, while 1.2% are not.
- Of those who are aware of the passenger rail service, more than three-fourths (76.9%) report that they know the name of the organization that provides the service, while 23.1% do not.
- Of the respondents who are aware of passenger rail service and know the name of the organization that provides it, 82.1% named "Amtrak" as the organization providing rail service, 16.8% cited "Downeaster", and two respondents named "Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority". No respondents cited the "Maine Department of Transportation".

**More than a quarter of respondents surveyed have used the passenger rail service from Portland to Boston. The majority of these respondents have used this service between 1 and 3 times since its inception.**

- Of the respondents who are aware of passenger rail service in Maine, 27.1% have used the service. Thus, 26.8% of the entire sample has used the passenger rail service from Portland to Boston at least once.

- Sixty-nine percent (68.7%) of those who are aware of passenger rail service and have used it, have used the service between 1 and 3 times. Twelve percent (11.9%) of these respondents have used the service between 4 and 6 times, and 9% have used it between 7 and 11 times.

**The top three reasons given for not having used passenger rail service are: that the opportunity has not come up to use the service, that the respondent does not travel to Boston, and that it is easier to drive.**

- Sixty-two percent (61.7%) of those respondents who have not used the passenger rail service cite that the "opportunity has not come up", 12.2% report that they "don't travel to Boston", and 10% feel it is "easier to drive or prefer to drive".

**Respondents who have traveled on the passenger rail service from Portland to Boston give high ratings to most aspects of the service. "Comfort" received the highest average rating and "convenience" received the lowest average rating.**

- On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is "very poor" and 5 is "excellent", respondents who have used the passenger rail service gave "comfort" an average rating of 4.70, "amenities on board" was given an average rating of 4.56, and "being on schedule" was rated 4.52. "Price/value for money" was rated 4.24, and "convenience" was given an average rating of 3.93. **All aspects of the rail service received an average rating of "good" or higher.**

**Of the respondents who are aware of the Portland to Boston passenger rail service, seven in ten feel the service has been successful.**

- Seventy percent (70.0%) of respondents rate the **"overall success"** of the service as successful (29.1% - "somewhat successful" and 40.9% - "very successful"). Three percent (2.8%) rate the **"overall success"** of the service as unsuccessful (0.4% - "somewhat unsuccessful" and 2.4% - "very unsuccessful"). **One-quarter (24.7%) of respondents were unsure how they would rate the "overall success" of the passenger rail service.**
- The top answers of respondents who feel the service has not been successful are financial - "heard they are losing money" (N = 4) and "people don't use it that often" (N = 3).

**There is strong support for the current passenger rail service from Portland to Boston.**

- Eighty percent (79.6%) of respondents support ("somewhat" or "strongly") the current passenger rail service.
- Of the respondents who are opposed to the passenger rail service between Portland and Boston, the top reason why was financial: "not a good use of taxes/waste of money" (N = 6).

**Results from Commuter Questions:** *(Asked as part of the 'Commuter' survey)*

**On average, respondents rate the current level of congestion on I-95 and I-295 during rush hours around Portland as "somewhat high" and they also feel that the level of congestion will increase in the next 20 years.**

- While 25.2% of respondents feel the current level of congestion is "very high" on I-95 and I-295, 58% would rate it as "somewhat high" and 14.4% feel it is "normal".
- When asked what the level of congestion on these highways will be 20 years from now, 67.6% of respondents project it to be "very high", 27.6% feel it will be "somewhat high" (95.2% very high/high) and 4.0% feel it will be "normal".

**The majority of respondents drive alone when commuting to work.**

- Eighty-eight percent (88.4%) of respondents drive alone to work, while 9.6% carpool. Five respondents indicated that they travel to the same job with a family member.

**Over one-third of respondents pay for their own parking while at work. These respondents pay an average of \$45.02 per month for parking.**

- While thirty-seven percent (36.8%) of respondents pay for their own parking, 63.2% indicated that they do not park in a place that costs money.
- Twenty-seven percent (27.2%) of those who must pay to park indicate that their employer pays for their parking in full, while the remaining pay between \$6 and \$80 per month. Of those who pay for parking, the average cost per month is \$45.02.

**There is strong support for the proposed commuter rail service from Yarmouth to Portland. Supporters of this proposal primarily feel that it would help reduce traffic, while those opposed are concerned that not enough people will use the service.**

- Nearly eight in ten respondents (79.6%) support ("somewhat" – 34.4% or "strongly" – 45.2%) commuter rail service from Yarmouth to Portland, while 11.6% oppose this idea.
- The top three reasons given in support of this service were: "would cut down on traffic" (22.1%), "wouldn't have to drive/ alternative to driving" (18.1%), and "many people would use it/ there is a need for it" (13.6%).
- Of the limited number opposed to commuter rail service, 55.2% are concerned that "not enough people will use the service" and 31.0% "don't want to spend tax money on it". Twenty-one percent (20.7%) of these respondents do not support the proposal because there will be "no service in this area".

**Approximately one-half of those surveyed report that they are likely to use the proposed commuter rail service. Many of those unlikely to use the service feel that the train station is inconvenient or they need a vehicle for their work.**

- Fifty-one percent of respondents (50.8%) are likely (32.8% - "somewhat likely" and 18.0% - "very likely") to use the proposed commuter rail, while 44.0% are unlikely (26.0% "not at all" and 18.0% "not very").
- The top three reasons given in opposition of the commuter rail are: "not convenient/station is too far away" (43.6%), "travel for job/ need car at work" (19.1%), and "prefer to drive" (15.5%).
- A higher proportion of Yarmouth (36.2%) and Freeport (26.0%) residents report that they are likely to use the service compared to respondents from Pownal (0.8%) and Durham (6.3).

**The majority of respondents who are likely to use the commuter rail service would use it daily and they would be willing to pay an average of \$47 a month for it, although a large percentage were unsure how much they would be prepared to pay.**

- Sixty-one percent (61.4%) of respondents report that they would use this service "daily" and 20.5% would use it "weekly". Six percent (5.5%) would use the service 2 to 4 times a week, 7.1% would use it "monthly", and 1.6% would use it "a few times per year".
- Of those who are likely to use the commuter rail, 60.6% are unsure how much they would be willing to pay per month for this service, although when prompted with the amount of \$60, 44.2% of these respondents stated that they would be willing to pay \$60 per month.
- Twenty-one percent (21.3%) of respondents would pay between \$30 and \$60 a month for this service, 9.4% would pay more than \$60, and 8.7% would pay \$30 or less.

**The top three train depot amenities desired by likely commuter rail users are parking availability, sheltered waiting areas, and a coffee/ snack/ newspaper vendor.**

- One-half (49.6%) of likely commuter rail users stated that they would like "parking availability" at the train depot in Yarmouth, 43.3% would like a "sheltered waiting area", 33.9% would like a "coffee/ snack/ newspaper vendor".

**Almost three-fourths of respondents feel that commuter rail service would have a positive impact on the community's quality of life and a majority of respondents feel it is important for the state to begin to provide this service to Maine residents.**

- Seventy-three percent (73.2%) of those surveyed feel that commuter rail would have a positive (49.6% - "somewhat" and 23.6% "very") impact on the quality of life of their community, while 4.8% feel it will have a negative impact and 15.6% are unsure.

- Eighty-four percent (84.0%) of respondents feel it is important (44.4% - “somewhat” and 39.6% - “very”) for the state to begin to provide commuter rail service, while 12.0% do not feel it is important.

**Respondents would prefer to get information about commuter rail service primarily from newspapers, the Internet, and television.**

- The top three sources respondents would like to get commuter services information from are: newspapers (53.6%), the Internet (25.2%), and television (12.8%).

From these findings, Swardlick Marketing Group sees strategic implications for the Department of Transportation – Office of Passenger Transportation in its ongoing role as the planner, facilitator and provider of safe, convenient and strategic public transportation for the people of Maine. In the following section, we present our view of these strategic implications.

#### **IV. Strategic Implications**

In the voluminous findings outlined above together with learning from the actual experience and performance of the existing Amtrak passenger rail service, there exist the building blocks of strategy relating to the expansion of passenger rail service in Maine. That is to say that the following facts serve as a foundation upon which definitive plans can be built. These facts are:

- People see congestion as an issue, and expect it to become worse.
- Most people believe that it is important for the State to plan and provide for more and better public transportation.
- Extending rail service is the most desired improvement.
- There is high awareness of the existing rail service.
- The existing rail service is seen as successful.
- Post-introduction traffic levels on the existing rail service show that ongoing marketing support is necessary.
- We believe there is a need to actively market rail service to Maine in the greater Boston area (given post-introductory period traffic levels), as we believe that this is where the greatest opportunity for passenger and revenue growth exists\*.
- People support expanding rail service north of Portland.
- People support the creation of commuter rail service, say they would use it and feel it would improve the quality of life in the area.

\*The greater population of the Boston market area provides a large pool of potential customers. This, plus the fact that a natural traffic pattern already exists for residents of that area to visit Southern and Coastal Maine as tourists suggests that this target market would be receptive to marketing messages promoting travel by passenger rail to Maine.

Based upon these strategic implications, we have developed a point-of-view that is expressed in the following strategic recommendations that we offer for the Department's consideration. We hope that these may serve as thought-starters, and the basis for an ongoing discussion that we would enjoy facilitating.



## **V. Strategic Recommendations**

### **A. “Inform Maine People About Rail Service Policy” -- Make MDOT/OPT’s Support of Rail More Visible**

While the department obviously does support passenger rail transportation, opportunities should be sought out and created to let Maine people know that the Department not only views passenger rail service as important but:

- Played a critical role in establishing and supporting the successful Amtrak rail service between Boston and Portland
- Is planning for the expansion of rail service to points north of Portland
- Is planning the creation of the state’s first modern commuter rail service
- Has an overall strategic plan that includes facilitation of passenger rail service to additional points in Maine, such as Rockland

The majority of Maine people who support rail should know that the Department is aligned with their point-of-view and is actively pursuing the expansion of rail service. By keeping the public informed and aware of its policy on passenger rail transportation, the Department is actually empowering the public to participate in public transportation policy-making. Further, this approach ensures that the dialogue includes the majority of Mainers, and not just those whose opposing self-interests motivate their participation. Keeping the public informed strengthens the Department’s credibility as an organization acting on behalf of the taxpayers, because the taxpayers are included in the process through the sharing of information.

### **B. “Share The Strategic Plan” – Let Maine People See What Is Planned For The Future**

Although the Department’s strategic plans have certainly not been kept from the public (anyone can go on the Internet and read them), awareness of those plans could be improved. The fact that Maine people expect congestion on their roads and highways to increase demands that the Department be proactive in sharing its strategic plan for alleviating congestion through the development of alternative modes of transportation. The bottom line is that a Department that is seen as being thoughtful, professional and forward-looking is going to enjoy greater support and respect than if it is seen as being reactive and “just keeping pace” with developments as they occur. The degree of support that taxpayers will give to investments in an improved public transportation infrastructure, including the expansion of rail service, will be greatly enhanced if the taxpayers see the “big picture” of what the vision is for the public transportation system, and how it benefits them.



**C. “Tell Mainers ‘We Listened’” – When Rail Expansion Begins, Let People Know It Is Being Done At Their Request**

The research proves that people support the expansion of rail, think it is the most important public transportation improvement that should be made, and feel that it is very important that the State support and provide such service. With all of that now established as fact, when it begins to become reality, it will be important to communicate that it is happening *because the people wanted it to happen*. It could be said that people tend to look to the Department of Transportation as a service provider – and as such, they want to be heard when they have a need. To acknowledge that you have listened to customers and acted to fulfill their needs is a powerful way to create very satisfied customers.

Further, the fact that Mainers believe that expanded passenger rail service will have distinct benefits in the areas of quality of life, the environment and economic development is something that can be reinforced through communications so that awareness of those expected benefits is high.

**D. “Continue To Build The Success Of Existing Rail Service” – Working in Partnership With NNEPRA, The Maine Office of Tourism and the Department of Economic and Community Development, Expand the Market Base for the Downeaster, and promote intermodal connections.**

As a follow-up to the introductory period of the Downeaster, during which the “novelty” of the new service and the significant media coverage of it served to fuel initially strong traffic, it is necessary that the market base for the Downeaster be expanded. To date, virtually no marketing for the service to Maine has been done in the greater Boston area, which is a proven source of visitors to Maine. Sufficient marketing must be done in the Boston area to assure the creation of a long-term pattern of traffic that is sustainable. One part of doing this is to promote the availability (and where necessary, create the availability) of intermodal connections designed to allow a visitor to Maine to quickly and easily connect from the train to, for instance, downtown Portland (in which case, the Portland Explorer already exists) or to Freeport.

In this area, the support and involvement of the Maine Office of Tourism is key, as there is an opportunity to promote the rail service to main through the Spring and Summer tourism campaign, as well as in the fulfillment materials that are mailed to potential Maine visitors. And, in as much as the success of rail service is a key to economic development, the Department of Economic and Community Development could provide additional support as a contribution to the marketing efforts.

**E. "Create A Set Of Integrated Marketing Programs Supporting Existing and New Rail Service" – Reach Into The Communities to Weave A Strong Fabric of Support for and Use of Rail.**

In support of the existing rail service, and upon the creation of the expanded Amtrak or creation of commuter rail, it would be highly beneficial and effective to reach into the communities that are served and establish a series of traffic-generating programs. Such programs could include (for example):

- "Employer Program" – Working in partnership with the largest employers in the communities served, establish a workplace communication program through which complete information about rail service is shared. In addition, create employer sponsored on-site events that create a high-level of awareness and a sense of excitement about the availability of rail. Lastly, as a benefit to the employees, offer a discounted program for multiple purchase supporting frequent use of the rail service.
- "Park & Ride Program" – Employ temporary roadside signs that communicate to drivers during a defined period that rail service exists as a convenient alternative to driving. At the same time, communicate to commuters that ample parking is available, and that "Commuter Books" of tickets are available at an attractive price (less than what they pay for parking in Portland).
- "Ticket Book Program" – To develop frequent travel, offer books of tickets valid for travel during a defined period at an attractive discount versus purchasing the same number of tickets individually.
- "Partner Lounge Program" – For the convenience of business travelers, establish agreements with certain hotels or inns in or near the stations, where travelers could go and relax comfortably prior to a scheduled pick-up by a van service or bus that would transport them to the train station.

## VI. Conclusion

Five strategic recommendations form the framework for a plan of action that we believe would enhance the ability of the Maine Department of Transportation, Office of Passenger Transportation to accomplish its goals relating to rail service:

1. "Inform Maine People About Rail Service Policy"
2. "Share the Strategic Plan"
3. "Tell Mainers 'We Listened'"
4. "Continue to Build the Success of Existing Rail Service"
5. "Create A Set Of Integrated Marketing Programs Supporting Existing and New Rail Service"

Only good can come from increasing the level of communication with taxpayers, as in so doing, the work of the Department, its plans and the basis for its actions, are all shared with the great majority of people who typically do not attend hearings or pursue such information.

Support of existing rail service assures that its success will continue, and will be a foundation upon which the expansion of rail northward and the creation of commuter rail service can be built. And, an aggressive program of support for the expansion of service is necessary.

In the end, these strategies could be summarized as one overall policy recommendation, that being:

*To undertake a proactive communications program that reaches out to Maine citizens as an additional service of the Department, to keep them informed and therefore involved in all that the Department is doing in the planning and support of rail service; and to act as an active partner in the marketing of rail service in order to assure its success.*

Thinking more broadly, the fact that the Department is actively preparing for the expansion of rail service (something that people want and support) provides the opportunity for passenger rail to be presented as an example of how the Department is planning and engineering for Maine's future.

With the high levels of support and expectation for the State to be involved in providing more and better public transportation, the Department should answer that demand by communicating its plans. We believe that, as a result, the Department will be seen as the entity responsible for researching, planning, engineering and facilitating or building the public transportation system that will ensure that Mainers continue to enjoy a great quality of life in a beautiful and thriving state.

This communication of the strategic plans that are in place could be accomplished through a carefully planned and executed public information and communications program. We

feel this would benefit the Department, as it would be seen much more as the highly professional organization that it is. This, in turn, should enhance the department's ability to fulfill its mission, by elevating the level of discussion to revolve around quality of life, environmental and economic development goals. With these things established as the widely known and accepted goals of the Department's work, debate on issues will occur in that frame of reference.

And finally, as a partner in the marketing of rail service, the Department will be in a position to follow-through on its strategic planning and assure that the vision it defined will become reality.

